

64 780 *An Acquaintance with God the best Support
under Afflictions.*

A
SERMON

Preach'd before the

QUEEN,

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St. James's, October 31. 1708.

JOB XXII. 21.

'Acquaint now thy self with him, and be at Peace.'

By FRANCIS ATTERBURY, D. D. Dean of *Carlisle*,
Preacher at the *Rolls*, and Chaplain in Ordinary
to Her MAJESTY.

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L O N D O N :

Printed and Sold by *H. Hills*, in *Black-Frayers* near
the Water-side, For the Benefit of the Poor. 1708.

the best of the
Afflictions

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By FRANCIS WYLLIE, D. D. Dean of Carlisle,
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Printed and sold by W. L. in Bank-Street, near
the Water-Door, at the Sign of the Book.

J O B XXII. 21.

Acquaint now thy self with him, and be at Peace.

TH E exceeding Corruption and Folly of Man is in nothing more manifest, than in his Averse-ness to entertain any Friendship or Familiarity with God; tho' he was fram'd for that very end, and endu'd with Faculties fitted to attain it; tho' he stands, and cannot but be sensible that he stands, in the utmost want of it; tho' he be invited, and encourag'd to it, frequently, and earnestly, by God himself; and tho' it be his Chief Honour, Advantage, and Happiness, as well as his Duty to comply with those Invitations.

In all Cases, where the Body is affected with Pain, or Sickness, we are forward enough to look out for Remedies, to listen greedily to every one that suggests them, and upon the least hopes of Success, from the Reports of others, immediately to apply them. And yet, notwithstanding that we find and feel our Souls disorder'd and restless, toss'd and disquieted by various Passions, distracted between contrary ends and interests, ever seeking Happiness in the Enjoyments of this World, and ever missing what they seek; notwithstanding that we are assur'd from other Mens Experience, and from our own Inward Convictions, that the only way of regulating these Disorders, is to call off our Minds from too close an Attention to the things of Sense, and to employ them often in a sweet Intercourse with our Maker, the Author of our Being, and Fountain of all our Ease and happiness; yet are we strangely backward to lay hold of this safe, this only Method of Cure: We go on still nourishing the Distemper under which we groan, and choose rather to feel the Pain, than to apply the Remedy. Excellent therefore was the Advice of *Eliphaz* to *Job*, when in the midst of his great Troubles and Pressures, he thus bespoke him, *Acquaint*

thy self now with him (i. e. with God) and be at Peace: Take this Opportunity of improving thy *Acquaintance* with God, to which he always, but now especially invites thee; Make the true use of those Afflictions, which his Hand, mercifully severe, hath been pleas'd to lay upon thee; and be led by the means of them, tho' thou hast Endeavour'd to know and serve Him already, to know and serve Him still better; to desire and love him more: Calm the Disorders of thy Mind by Reflections on his Paternal Goodness and Tenderness: on the Wisdom and Equity, and absolute Rectitude of all his Proceedings: Comfort thy self with such Thoughts at all times, but chiefly at that time, when all Earthly Comforts fail thee; Then do thou particularly retreat to these Considerations, and shelter thy self under them; — *Acquaint now thy self with him, and be at Peace.*

The Words, therefore, will suggest Matter not unfit for our Devout Meditation, under the Three following Heads; wherein I shall consider,

I. What this Scripture Phrase of *acquainting our selves with God* implies, and wherein the Duty recommended by it particularly consists.

II. How Reasonable, Necessary and Desirable a Duty it is, as on many other Accounts, so especially on this, That it is the only true way towards attaining a perfect Tranquility and Rest of Mind, — *Acquaint thy self with him, AND BE AT PEACE.* Which will lead me also to shew, in the

III. Place, That the most proper Season for such a Religious Exercise of our Thoughts is, when any Trouble, or Calamity overtakes us, *Acquaint thy self now with him.*

I. We are to consider, What this Scripture Phrase of *Acquainting our selves with God*, implies, and wherein the Duty recommended by it, particularly consists. The Phrase it self occurs, I think, no where else in Holy Writ; however, the true meaning of it is very Obvious and Easie.

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We are prone by Nature to engage our selves in too close and strict an Acquaintance with the things of this World, which immediately and strongly strike our Senses, with the Business, the Pleasures, and the Amusements of it; we give our selves up too greedily to the pursuit, and immerse our selves too deeply in the Enjoyment of them; and contract at last such an Intimacy and Familiarity with them, as makes it difficult and irksome for us to call off our Minds to a better Employment, and to think intently on any thing besides them. To check and correct this ill Tendency, it is requisite that we should *acquaint our selves with God*; that we should frequently disengage our Hearts from Earthly Pursuits, and fix them on Divine things; that we should Apply our selves to study the blessed Nature and Perfections of God, and to Precure Lively and vigorous Impressions of his perpetual Presence with us, and Inspection over us; that we should contemplate earnestly and reverently the Works of Nature and Grace, by which he manifests himself to us; the inscrutable Ways of his Providence, and all the wonderful Methods of his dealing with the Sons of Men: That we should inure our selves to such Thoughts, 'till they have work'd up our Souls into that filial Awe and Love of him, that humble and implicit Dependence upon him, which is the Root and Principle of all manner of Goodness, 'till we have made our Duty in this respect, our Pleasure, and can address our selves to him, on all Occasions, with Readiness and Delight; imparting all our Wants, and expressing all our Fears, and opening all our Grievs to him, with that holy Freedom and Confidence to which the Saints and true Servants of God are entitled, having *received the Spirit of Adoption, whereby they cry, Abba Father!* In this Sense ought we to *acquaint our selves with God*, to *set him always before us*, as the Scripture elsewhere speaks; to *draw near to him*, and to *delight in approaching him*.

But this is only a general Account of what our Ac-

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acquaintance with God implies: It may be useful to mention some Particulars also, wherein it chiefly consists; and to say somewhat distinctly upon each of them.

In order to begin, and improve Human Friendships, Five Things are principally requisite; *Knowledge, Access, a Similitude of Manners*, and entire *Confidence*, and *Love*: and by These also the Divine Friendship, of which we are treating, must be cemented, and upheld,

The first Step towards an *acquaintance with God*, is a due *Knowledge* of him: I mean not a Speculative Knowledge, built on abstracted Reasonings about his Nature and Essence; such a Philosophical Minds often busie themselves in, without reaping from thence any advantage towards regulating their Passions, or improving their Manners: But I mean a Practical Knowledge of those Attributes of his, which invite us nearly to approach him, and closely to unite our selves to him; a thorough Sense, and Vital Experience of his Paternal Care over us, and Concern for us; of his unspotted Holiness, his inflexible Justice, his unerring Wisdom, and his diffusive Goodness; a Representation of him to our selves, under those affecting Characters of a *Creator*, and a *Redeemer*, an *Observer*, and a *Pattern*, a *Law giver*, and a *Judge*; which are aptest to incline our Wills, and to raise our Affections towards him, and either to awe, or allure us into a stricter Performance of every Branch of our Duty. These, and the like *Moral*, and *Relative* Perfections of the Duty, are most necessary, and most easie to be understood by us; upon the least Reflection and Enquiry we cannot miss of them; tho' the oftner, and more attentively we consider them, the better, and more perfectly still shall we know them.

The Acquaintance, thus begun, cannot continue, without frequent *Access* to him; without *seeking his Face continually* (as the good Psalmist's Phrase is) in all the Methods of Spiritual Address; in Contemplation, and Prayer; in his Word, and in his Ordinances; in the Publick Service of the Sanctuary, and in the Private Devo-

Devotions of the Closet; and chiefly in the latter of these, which are, on several accounts, most useful towards promoting this holy Correspondence. By these Means, and in these Duties, is he to be approach'd, and found; and, notwithstanding our infinite Distance, will *draw near to Them who thus draw near to Him*, and shew himself to be a God that *is at Hand*, and *not afar off*.

But in vain shall we approach him, unless we endeavour to be *like* him: A Similitude of Nature and Manners (in such a degree as we are capable of) must tie the holy knot, and rivet the Friendship between us. Whomsoever we desire to approve, we labour also to conform our selves to; to be *not only almost, but altogether such as they are*, if it be possible; that so They, seeing Themselves in Us, may like Us, for the sake of Themselves, and go out (as it were) to meet, and embrace their Own Image and Resemblance. Would we then be admitted into an Acquaintance with God? Let us study to resemble him: We must be *partakers of a Divine Nature*, in order to partake of this high Privilege and Alliance! *For what Fellowship hath Righteousness with Unrighteousness? and what Communion hath Light with Darknes?*

Yet farther, One Essential Ingredient in all true Friendships, is, affirm unshaken *Reliance* on him who is our Friend. Have we such towards God? Do we entirely Trust in him? Do our Souls lean on him, as a Child that is weaned of his Mother? Do we resign our selves, and our Affairs, absolutely to be dispos'd of by him? and think all our Concerns safer in his Hands, than in our own? and resolve to believe every thing to be best and fittest for us, which he sees best should befall us? Are we still under his Rod, without a Murmur? without Despondency of Mind, and without charging God foolishly? do we unbofom all our Secrets to him, and neither endeavour, nor pretend to hide any thing that passeth in the depht of our Hearts from him? Do

we inquire of him for his Advice and Assistance in every thing? and hearken to what our Lord God shall say to us, either by the inward Whispers of our Consciences, or the outward Ministry of his Word, or the awakening Calls of his Providence? and give heed diligently to fulfil all the least Intimations of his good Pleasure, that are any ways made known to us? — Then have we entred deep into, and advanc'd far in that holy Intimacy which the Text recommends: O well is it with us! Happy are we, and shall we be!

However, *yet one thing more we lack* to be perfect; Love, which is the *fulfilling of this Law* of Friendship, the surest Test, and most exalted Improvement of it.

Let us consider, therefore, Whether we do indeed *love the Lord our God, with all our Heart, and with all our Soul, and with all our Mind, and with all our Strength*: Whether our Approaches to Him are always Sweet and Refreshing; and we are uneasie, and impatient under any long discontinuance of our Conversation with Him; and retire into our Closet from the Crowd, in order to meet Him whom our Soul loveth, with a Pleasure far exceeding Theirs, who *Chant to the Sound of the Viol*, and are *joyful in the Strength of New Wine*: Whether our Heart burns within us, at the perusal of his Holy Word: and the Relish and Savour of it upon our Minds be such, as that, in comparison of it, all the most Exquisite Humane Composures seem low and mean, flat and insipid to us: Whether we have an even, and ever burning Zeal for his Honour and Service: and are always contriving somewhat, and doing somewhat to promote His Interest, without any immediate regard to our Own: Whether we delight to make mention of His Name, and to make our Boast in His Praise, even among those who fear Him not, and know Him not; and to render our Goodness and our Devotion Exemplary, in proportion to the Vices and the Irreligion of others: Finally, Whether our Love of Life,
and

and our Complacence in the good Things of it, slackness every day, and even our Dread of Death is in some measure vanquish'd; and we do, whilst we are contemplating the Joys of another State, almost *desire to be dissolv'd, and to be with Christ*, and groan under those Earthly Clogs and Bars, that incumber and obstruct us in our flight towards Him, and hinder our Mind from exerting with freedom all its Faculties and Powers on the Supreme Object of its Desires, Hopes, and Endeavours? When we perceive our selves to be, after this manner, *rooted and grounded in Love*, and to abound in these Genuine and blessed Fruits of it; behold! Then is our Spirit advanc'd to the nearest degree of Union with the great Father of Spirits, of which it is capable on this side Heaven; and we are, indeed, (according to what is said of faithful *Abraham* in holy Writ) *the Friends of God*.

Thus have I shewn you, What it is, to *acquaint our selves with God*, and wherein this *Acquaintance* chiefly consists; to wit, in an intimate *Knowledge* of him, a frequency of *Access* to him, a *Conformity* and Likeness of Temper and Manners, an humble and implicit *Reliance* upon Him, and an ardent *Affection* of Soul towards Him. I proceed now, in the

II. Place, to consider, How *Reasonable, Desirable*, and *Necessary* a thing it is, thus to acquaint our selves with God, as, on many other accounts, so particularly on this; That it is the only true Way towards attaining a perfect *Tranquillity* and *Rest* of Mind; *Acquaint thy self with Him, AND BE AT P E A C E*.

Honour, Profit, and Pleasure, are the three great Idols, to which the Men of this World bow; and One, or all of which, is generally aimed at, in every *Human* Friendship they make: and yet, tho' nothing can be more *Honourable, Profitable, or Pleasing* to us, than an Acquaintance with God, we stand off from it, and will not be tempted even by these Motives, tho' appearing

pearing to us with the utmost Advantage, to embrace it.

Can any thing improve, and purifie, and exalt our Natures more than such a Conversation as this, wherein our Spirits, mounting on the Wings of Contemplation, Faith, and Love, ascend up to the first Principle, and Cause of all things, see, admire, and tast his surpassing Excellence, and feel the Quickning-Power and Influence of it, 'till we our selves, thus *with open Face beholding, as in a Glass, the Glory of the Lord, are changed* (gradual, and insensibly changed) *into the same Image, from Glory to Glory,* from one degree of Perfection, and Likeness, to another? What an *Honour* is it to us, that God should admit us into such a blessed Participation of himself? that he should give us Minds capable of such an Intercourse with the Supreme, Universal Mind? and shall we be capable of it, without enjoying it?

In what Conversation can we spend our thoughts and time more profitably, than in this? to whom can we betake our selves, with greater Expectations to succeed in our Addresses? Upon whom can we rely with more security and confidence? Is he not our most munificent Benefactor, our Wisest Counsellor, and most Potent Protector and Friend? both Able, and Willing to do every thing for us, that it becomes either us to ask, or him to grant. Are not the Blessings both of this World, and the next in his disposal? and is not his Favour and Good-will the only sure Title that we can plead to them? and shall we spend our time therefore in cultivating useless and perishing Acquaintances here below, to the neglecting that which is of the wastest Concern to us, and upon which our everlasting Welfare depends? shall we not rather say, with St. Peter, *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the Words of Eternal Life.*

O! the sweet Contentment, the Tranquillity, and profound rest of Mind that he enjoys, who is a Friend of God, and to whom God [therefore] is a Friend; who hath gotten loose from all meaner Pursuits, and is regardless of all lower Advantages, that interfere with his great Design of knowing, and loving God, and being known, and belov'd by him; who lives as in his Sight, always, looks up to him in every Step of his Conduct, imitates him to the best of his Power, believes him without doubt, and obeys him without reserve; desires to do nothing but what is agreeable to his Will, and resolves to fear nothing beyond, or beside his displeasure: In a word, who hath resign'd all his Passions and appetites to him; all his faculties and powers; and given up his Soul to be possess'd by him, without a Rival. Surely such an one hath within his Breast, that divine *Peace which passeth all Understanding*; is inconceivable, by those who are Strangers to it, and inutterable even by those upon whom it rests. In vain doth the Scornful Voluptuary ask for an account of it, which can never be given him; for it hath no Alliance with any of the Pleasures of Sense, in which he delights; nor hath he any Ideas, by which the Perception of it may be convey'd to him: It may make the Prophets Challenge and say, *To what will you liken me? and wherewithal will you compare me?* This Peace is to be understood, only by being enjoy'd; and such an *Acquaintance with God* as the Text recommends, is the only Means of enjoying it. But I hasten, in the

III. And last place, to shew, That the most proper Season for such a Religious Exercise of our Thoughts, is, when any sore Trouble or Calamity overtakes us, — *Acquaint thy self now with him*, said *Eliphaz* to *Job*; that is, now, when the wise disposer of all things hath thought fit to pour out Affliction upon thee; then that Peace, or sweet Calm and Repose of Mind, which the Text mentions, is most needful for thee, and is always, and only to be had from the same Hand that wounded thee.

At such times our Soul is most tender and susceptible of Religious Impressions, most apt to *seek God*, to *delight in approaching him*, and conversing with him, and to relish all the Pleasures and Advantages of such a Spiritual Commerce. The kind and chief design of God, in all his severest Dispensations, is, to melt and soften our Hearts to such Degrees, as he finds necessary, in order to the good purposes of his Grace; and so to dispose and prepare them every way, as that they may become fit Mansions for his Holy Spirit to dwell in; to wean us gently and gradually from our Complacence in Earthly things, which we are too apt to rest in, tho' we are sure that we must one day part with them; to convince us of the Vanity of all the Satisfaction which this World affords, and to turn our Thoughts and Expectations towards the Joys of another.

We are, by Nature, Indigent Creatures, incapable of our selves to content and satisfy our selves; and therefore are ever looking abroad for somewhat to supply our Defects and compleat our Happiness. To this end, our Wills and Affection run out after every seeming Good here below; but return empty and unsatisfy'd always from the pursuit, and therefore cannot but suggest to us the thought, and possess us with the desire of some higher Good, which is their only adequate object, and in which alone true Joys are to be found. But we have the most feeling sense and experience of this Truth, when the Hand of God lies heavy upon us: Then we plainly discern our own insufficiency and weakness, and yet see nothing about or near us, that can afford us any real Relief: and therefore we fly to *Him*, who only can, who is rich in Mercies, and mighty to save: both able and willing to stretch himself out to all our wants, and to fill our Emptiness. Even they, who in their Prosperity forget God, do yet remember and turn to him when Adversity befalls them: They, who, whilst the Course of things goes smoothly and happily on, and every Passion of theirs is entertain'd, every Wish is grati-
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fy'd, find no room for Thoughts of this kind: but are so taken up with enjoying the Blessings, as not to be at leisure to consider the great Author and bestower of them; even these Persons, do, in the Day of their distress, take Refuge in Reflections on the Benignity and Goodness of God; and begin then to think of him with some kind of Pleasure (tho' allay'd with doubts and fears) when they can with Pleasure think of nothing besides him. How much more shall devout and blameless Souls, which have never been Strangers to these Considerations, retreat to them, in an Evil Hour, with eagerness, and rest in them with the utmost Satisfaction and Delight? The Acquaintance, which they stand in need of for their Support, is not now first to be made: It has been contracted long ago, and wants only to be renew'd, and apply'd to particular Exigences and Occasions. Happy, extremely happy are they, who, by the means of a Virtuous Temper, and a Religious Education, have been train'd up in this Acquaintance from their very Youth; that Season of our Age, when the Frindships we enter into a most sincere and true, most passionate and tender, most firm and durable: whilst our Minds were as yet untainted with false Principles, and vicious customs, and had not drunk in that Contagion from ill Company, which indisposes us for better, had not made that *Friendship with the World, which is Enmity with God. Behold, Then was the day of Salvation, Then was the accepted Time:* when God most valu'd the Offer of our Hearts, and we could give them up to him most easily, and most intirely. And when once we have thus early, and thoroughly devoted our selves to God, there are no Trials of our Virtue and Courage so sharp, no Evils so great, but that we can sustain and bear them: for *God is our hope and Strength, a very present Help in Time of Trouble:* and, therefore, we resort to Him, on such Occasions, with the utmost Readiness and Confidence, even as a Son doth to a beloved and loving Parent, or a Friend to the Friend of his

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Bosom, casting all our Care upon Him, as knowing that He carrieth for us.

I have set God always before me (says good David :) He is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall. And, having set God always before him, what wonder is it, if he found the special advantage of such a practise, in the time of his sufferings and Sorrows ? And, therefore, thus, in another Place, professes of himself, — *When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God ?*

No Man had ever study'd the several Arts of Holy Living, with greater care than he, no Man had more diligently practis'd them : his delight was in the Law of God ; and in That did he exercise himself Day and Night. He took heed to his Feet and order'd all his Steps aright, that he might run the way of God's Commandments. And what, at last, was the great Expedient he pitch'd upon to secure himself in a Regular and Uniform Course of Virtue ? even this, — *To set God always before himself ; to watch early and late, to remember him on his Bed, and to think on him when he was waking.* He was the Man after God's own Heart ; and this was the chief Method by which he became so : It was This that enabled him to fulfil the Publick Character of a Religious, Just, and Merciful Prince, and a Father of his People ; and that aw'd him in his Retirements, when the Eyes of men were far from him : It was this that gave life, and Wings to his Devotions ; that carry'd him through various difficulties and Temptations ; that supported him under all his Troubles and Afflictions. — *When I am in heaviness, (said he) I will think upon God ; when my Heart is vexed, I will complain to him.*

He might have thought on many other Things, which are usually look'd upon as Reliefs to afflicted Minds : he might have endeavour'd to raise himself by reflecting on the happy Circumstances of his Royal State, on his Power, and Wealth, and Worldly Splendor ; on the Love and Reverence that was paid him by his Subjects, on his Fame, that was gone out into

all Lands, and on the feard of him that was fallen upon all Nations ; on his potent and numerous Alliances, his Signal Successes and Triumphs. But he renounces all these weak insufficient Supports, and betakes himself to That, which was worth them all, and which alone could Administer true Comfort to him. *When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God.*

And how can the pious Sons and daughters of Affliction better employ themselves, than in looking up to him that hath bruised them, and possessing their Souls in *Patience*, under the same Thought, with which this good Prince quieted his griefs, *because it is Thy hand, and Thou, Lord, hast done it ?* What comfort and Composedness of Mind must it afford 'em, to consider, that these are the Chastisements of a kind Father, who means them for our good, and *doth not willingly afflict, or grieve the Children of Men, but even in his Wrath thinketh upon Mercy :* and *will with the Temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it ?*

Let us imitate the Pattern, which this Royal Sufferer hath set us : Let us follow this Excellent guide ; by laying hold of the Remedy, which he found so succesful, in the day of Visitation. Let us, throughout the whole Course of our Lives, take care to make the Thoughts of God, so present, Familiar, and comfortable to us here, that we may not be afraid of appearing Face to Face before him hereafter. Let us so inure our Minds to those faint Views of him, which we can attain to in this Life, that we may be found worthy to be admitted into the Blessed Vision of him in the next, when in his presence there will be fulness of Joy, and at his Right hand Pleasures for evermore.

To Him, Father, Son, and holy Ghost, Three Persons, and one God, be ascrib'd by Us, and all Men, all Possible Adoration and Praise, Might, Majesty, and Dominion, Now, and for evermore. Amen.

F I N I S.

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